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ABSTRACT

A study examined how the SPEAK (Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit) Test is perceived by both International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) and instructors at a major midwestern university where it is used as a screening instrument for hiring ITAs. Subjects, 24 ITAs from the social sciences and 24 ITAs from the math-based sciences who took the SPEAK test over a 2-year period, completed an affective reactions questionnaire. Results indicated that there was no overall significant difference in ITAs' affective reactions to the SPEAK test in terms of ethnic backgrounds, when they took the test, or their fields. Results of interviews of five ITA instructors indicated that some instructors mentioned the lack of face validity and voiced some concerns about how difficult it was to judge the overall comprehensibility of the ITA. (Ten tables of data are included; 24 references and the ITA questionnaire are attached.) (RS)

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The SPEAK Test: International Teaching Assistants' and Instructors' Affective Reactions

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Introduction

Recent survey on employed international students at different institutions at the U.S. (The Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 28, 1990) found that at 176 Ph. D. granting institutions there are 46,479 international scholars. Thirteen percent of international scholars are occupied with teaching at these institutions. Prior to coming to the U.S. these international students are granted either a teaching or research assistant position. In most institutions granting a teaching assistantship or research assistantship to a new international graduate student works as a contract between universities and these individuals, an arrangement which guarantees financial assistance to these incoming international graduate students who are admitted to different degree programs. By state law or university regulations they may be required to prove that they have sufficient oral English proficiency in order to be able to carry out instruction in an American institution. Frequently they are required to take the SPEAK test (The Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Kit) which is the institutional version of the Test of Spoken English, developed by the Educational Testing Services (ETS). (1982)

The SPEAK Test has seven sections. Each of the sections is timed. *The first section* is not scored because it is used for a warm-up; it includes some warm-up types of questions to make the examinee feel at ease. In the *second section* the examinee is asked to read a paragraph loud in a minute. In the *third section* the examinee is given ten incomplete written sentences to be completed orally. The picture story section follows as *the fourth section*; the examinee is given a series of pictures to examine and is asked to tell a story. In *section five* the examinee studies a picture and answers four questions related it. In *section six* there are open-ended questions. In *the last section* the examinee studies a class schedule

and then explains this it. The topics covered in this test are general, everyday topics which have very little to do with most ITAs' (International Teaching Assistant) majors.

Most of the ITAs, roughly speaking, 60 %, are employed in the fields of science and technology. ITA education and training is a field which has not been given enough emphasis; nor have there been clear cut decisions made by governments and institutions. Goodman and Nacht (1983) view the education of foreign students in American colleges and universities as an "absence of decision" . Recruiting ITAs to teach introductory courses is not an exception to this phenomenon. So far most institutions have been using the SPEAK Test as a screening device without much scrutiny.

Some descriptive studies that have been done in this area have criticized the SPEAK Test. Barrett (1987) and Braswell and Green (1987) have discussed the inadequacies of this test as not being a valid and reliable testing instrument . It is also a common belief that most ITAs who have taken this test have not had good impressions of it. The purpose of this paper is to see how the SPEAK Test is perceived by both ITAs and instructors at a major midwestern university where it is used as a screening instrument for hiring ITAs.

In fact, this paper has stemmed from two areas of inquiry. The first is research with international teaching assistants. Within this broad area there have been several studies published on the SPEAK. Earlier studies on the SPEAK Test concentrated on validity and reliability issues. Abraham & Plakans (1988) provided an overall evaluation of the SPEAK and in-house TEACH tests. In addition, there are some studies that compare the SPEAK Test with other ways of

assessing oral proficiency, such as the FSI oral interview (Mellor, 1987) and field-specific tests (Smith, 1989). Clark and Swinton (1980) found that both the Test of Spoken English (TSE) and the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) Oral Interview are valid and effective predictors of oral proficiency. The FSI seems to have slightly higher face validity. Bejar (1985) and Stansfield, and Ballard (1984) have also done research on validity and reliability issues.

The other major area of research in second language testing is affective reactions of test takers to different kinds of language tests (Savignon, 1972; Brutsch, 1979; Jones et al, 1980; Shohamy, 1982; Scott and Madsen, 1983; Madsen, 1982; Madsen and Murray, 1984.) Various factors, such as length, format, limited time for giving answers, whether the test is perceived as a valid test or not, clarity of directions to the test, and anxiety were found to influence students' perceptions of tests that they take. Spielberger (1966) distinguished between trait anxiety (a stable personality characteristic) and state anxiety (transitory). Schwarzer, van der Ploeg, and Spielberger (1982) argued that state anxiety is seen more frequently in people who have higher instances of trait anxiety. Alpert and Haber (1960) talk about a facilitating and/or a debilitating effect of anxiety on the end result. Madsen (1982) and Hill (1983) believe that state anxiety causes more debilitating effect on people. Hill (1983) pointed out the negative effect of time limitations on individuals. As a result of his study children who had high test anxiety made errors three times more often than the children who were considered as having low test anxiety. Madsen's (1982) study on ESL students showed that several factors such as unclear directions, lack of face validity, insufficient time, format of the exam (cloze, multiple choice, interview, etc) seem to create anxiety in people.

An interesting finding by McKeachie et al. (1955) and Calvin et al. (1957) is that to be able to talk and express how they feel about a test releases anxiety. The Savignon (1972) and Shohamy (1980) studies pointed out that students have a pleasant and relaxing experience when they take an oral interview. Even if they did not show great performance during the interview they felt the interview was a fair and valid type of test; it tested what they should be asked to perform in a real life situation.

Scott (1980) in her study on Japanese and Spanish test takers revealed that there was a difference in affective reactions towards certain items that involves the individuals emotionally in a crosscultural perspective. Spanish speakers seemed to react to the items that frustrate them more positively than the Japanese.

Method

Subjects

The data analyzed in this study were collected in the Summer quarter of the 1989-1990 academic year from 24 ITAs who took the SPEAK Test in 1988-89 and 24 ITAs who took the same test in 1989-90 academic years, thus totalling 48 volunteer ITAs. Twelve of the 24 ITAs in each group were from the social sciences and the other half (12) were from math-based sciences. Different engineering fields, math, physics, chemistry, genetics, astronomy, computer science, forest products, biochemistry, food science and nutrition, and economics are all considered math-based sciences. On the other hand, psychology, sociology, English, linguistics, foreign languages (French, German, etc.), journalism, East Asian studies, education, anthropology, art history, and geography represent the social based sciences included in this study.

The volunteer ITAs for this study were from the People's Republic of China (PRC-15 individuals), Korea(10), Taiwan (4), Hong Kong (2), Japan (2), Panama (1), Peru (1), India (3), Iran (1), Turkey (3), U. S. S. R. (1), Israel (1), Nigeria (1), Finland (1), and Vietnam (1). For part of the statistical analysis three major groups were formed. The first consisted of ITAs from the PRC, the second major group had ITAs from Korea, and ITAs from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan constituted the third distinct group.

Volunteer ITAs in the study:

PRC	15
Korea	10
Taiwan	4
Hong Kong	2
Japan	2
Panama	1
Peru	1
India	3
Iran	1
Turkey	3
U.S.S.R	1
Israel	1
Nigeria	1
Finland	1
Vietnam	1

Procedure

The researcher prepared an affective reactions questionnaire of total 32 items. (See Appendix I) This questionnaire was given to 24 ITAs who took the SPEAK Test in the '88-'89 academic year, and to 24 other ITAs both in math and social science fields who took the SPEAK between January and June of 1990. The first

part of the questionnaire elicited biographical data from the subjects. Questions # 3, 4, 31 and 34 required quantitative information. The format of the rest of the questions was organized as a four-point Likert-style scale. All the items have space for the ITAs to explain their ratings. Some of the subjects wrote in their reactions after the rating; some had an oral follow-up interview.

Oral interviews with some of the ITA program instructors were also conducted individually and recorded.

Hypotheses (questions)

In this study the following questions were asked to investigate the reactions of ITAs to the SPEAK Test:

1. Is there a difference between what math-based science (ITAs) and ITAs coming from the social sciences think about the SPEAK Test?

2. Is there a difference between the attitudes toward the SPEAK Test of ITAs who took the SPEAK Test during 1988-1989 and during the 1989-1990 academic year?

3. What is the relationship of cultural (ethnic origin) background of ITAs to how well they perceive the SPEAK Test?

4. Is there an attitude difference toward the SPEAK Test between ITAs who passed the SPEAK test and those who did not?

5. What is the relationship of gender and attitudes toward on the SPEAK Test?

6. Is age related to attitudes toward the SPEAK Test?

7. What is the relationship between passing the SPEAK Test and the amount of English ITAs have had?

Analysis

After the questionnaires were collected, 21 items out of 32 were chosen for analysis in this study. The remaining 11 questions were specific questions that were not relevant to every ITA. Based on these 21 items a total reaction score was calculated for 48 ITA's who participated in the study. There were four blanks in the questionnaire and values, 1 to 4 were attributed to the blanks. The most positive got a score of 4 and the least positive got a score of 1. Overall the total attitude score towards the SPEAK Test is rather low; scores ranged from 37 to 71 out of 84.

Question # 1 & 2:

Hypothesis 1: There is a difference between what math-based ITAs and social science-based ITAs think about the SPEAK Test.

Hypothesis 2: There is a difference between the attitudes toward the SPEAK Test of ITAs who took the SPEAK during 88-89 and during 89-90 academic years.

A two-way anova was computed to see if there is any significant difference in total attitude score between groups on these two factors. The means of the groups on the factors are very close to each other and they do not show a statistically significant difference neither between year nor across fields. Then a two-way anova by year (88-89, 89-90) and field (math, social science) for each item was done. Some of the items showed a significant difference in means. Questions 6, 12, and 27 proved to be statistically significant in the analysis when the ITAs of 1989-90 were compared to the ITAs who took the SPEAK Test last year. On the

other hand, questions 13, 25, and 29 were perceived differently by ITAs that came from different backgrounds. In the interaction of year and field questions 6 and 26 were found to yield significant interactions. Results are presented in Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4.

TABLE I

TWO WAY ANOVA ON TOTAL ATTITUDE SCORE BY YEAR AND FIELD

	Field		
Means	Math/Sci	SocSci	
Year I	50.92	51.75	51.33
Year II	57.00	52.00	54.50
Total	53.96	51.88	

ANOVA TABLE

SV	df	SS	MS	F	P
Year	1	120.33	120.33	2.369	.131
Field	1	52.1	52.1	1.02	.317
YearXField	1	102.1	102.1		.163
Residual	44	2235.2			

TABLE 2

Summary of Two-way Anovas On Each Item of the SPEAK Test (by Field)

	Means			
Items	Math/Sci	Soc Sci	F	P
Q1	5.00	5.00	0.00	1.00
Q2	3.833	3.584	0.25	0.61
Q5	4.250	5.417	3.24	0.08
Q6	6.666	6.167	0.77	0.34
Q8	5.333	4.750	0.87	0.35
Q9	6.333	6.666	0.25	0.61
Q11	5.834	6.166	0.29	0.59
Q12	5.167	5.667	0.56	0.45
Q13	4.417	3.417	4.28	0.04*
Q14	4.00	2.917	2.95	0.09
Q15	4.250	4.250	0.00	1.00
Q17	3.583	3.416	0.12	0.72
Q19	6.500	6.500	0.00	1.00
Q20	5.584	5.250	0.21	0.64
Q21	7.166	7.250	0.04	0.83
Q22	4.250	3.666	1.15	0.28
Q25	7.750	6.917	3.79	0.05*
Q26	3.916	4.833	0.30	0.58
Q27	4.333	4.416	0.01	0.90
Q28	4.416	3.916	0.53	0.47
Q29	5.417	4.000	4.04	0.05*

* Significant at .05

TABLE 3

Summary of Two-way Anovas On Each Item Of The SPEAK Test (by Year)

	Means			
Items	Year 1(88-89)	Year 2 (89-90)	F	P
Q1	4.500	5.500	3.09	0.86
Q2	3.250	4.167	3.38	0.07
Q5	4.834	4.834	0.00	1.00
Q6	5.833	7.000	4.17	0.04*
Q8	4.916	5.167	0.16	0.69
Q9	6.666	6.333	0.25	0.61
Q11	6.500	5.500	2.65	0.11
Q12	4.667	6.167	5.09	0.02*
Q13	3.834	4.000	0.11	0.73
Q14	3.167	3.750	0.85	0.36
Q15	3.917	4.583	1.22	0.27
Q17	3.583	3.416	0.12	0.72
Q19	6.666	6.334	0.36	0.55
Q20	5.334	5.500	0.05	0.81
Q21	7.416	7.000	1.04	0.31
Q22	3.750	4.166	0.58	0.40
Q25	7.167	7.500	0.60	0.44
Q26	4.083	4.083	0.00	1.00
Q27	3.666	5.083	4.50	0.03*
Q28	4.166	4.166	0.00	1.00
Q29	4.667	4.750	0.01	0.90

* Significant at .05

TABLE 4

Summary of Two-way Anova on Each Item of the SPEAK Test(Year by Field Interaction)

	Means					
Items	Math 1/ Year 1	Math 2/Year 2	SoSci1/Year 1	SoSci2/Year 2	F	P
Q1	2.167	2.833	2.333	2.667	0.34	0.56
Q2	1.583	2.250	1.667	1.917	0.69	0.40
Q5	2.333	1.917	2.500	2.917	1.65	0.20
Q6	3.333	3.333	2.500	3.667	4.17	0.04*
Q8	2.333	3.000	2.583	2.167	3.02	0.08
Q9	3.083	3.250	3.583	3.083	1.02	0.31
Q11	3.417	2.417	3.083	3.083	2.65	0.11
Q12	2.000	3.167	2.667	3.000	1.57	0.21
Q13	2.167	2.250	1.667	1.750	0.00	1.00
Q14	1.750	2.250	1.417	1.500	0.43	0.51
Q15	1.917	2.333	2.000	2.250	0.07	0.78
Q17	1.750	1.833	1.833	1.583	0.51	0.47
Q19	3.333	3.167	3.333	3.167	0.00	1.00
Q20	2.667	2.917	2.667	2.583	0.21	0.64
Q21	3.833	3.333	3.583	3.667	2.04	0.15
Q22	1.917	2.333	1.833	1.833	0.58	0.44
Q25	3.750	4.000	3.417	3.500	0.15	0.69
Q26	1.583	2.333	2.500	1.750	6.08	0.01*
Q27	1.583	2.750	2.083	2.333	1.88	0.17
Q28	2.083	2.333	2.083	1.833	0.53	0.47
Q29	2.417	3.000	2.250	1.750	2.36	0.13

* significant at .05

Question # 3

Hypothesis 3: There would be a difference in the perception of the SPEAK Test among three different Asian groups. (PRC- Korea-Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan). There does not seem to be a difference whether ITAs are from Japan or Korea or China, they all perceive the test in the same way. The People's Republic of China has 15 ITAs, Korea alone has 10 ITAs, and lastly Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have 8 ITAs in the cross-cultural comparison. The results of this analysis are reported in Table 5. The means of these groups in terms of their total attitude score are very close to each other. The null hypothesis of equal means was not rejected.

Other one-way anovas reveal that there is no difference among these three Asian groups with respect to their mean ages or the years of formal English that they have had back in their countries. (Refer to Tables 6 & 7).

TABLE 5

COMPARISON OF TOTAL ATTITUDE SCORE MEANS FOR ASIAN GROUPS

	Chinese (N=15)	Korean(N=10)	Japanese-Hong Kong-Taiwan (N=8)
Means	51.40	51.20	55.50

ONE-WAY ANOVA ON TOTAL ATTITUDE SCORE

SV	df	SS	MS	F	P
Group	2	106.13	53.06	1.07	0.35
Residual	30	1475.20	49.17		
Total	32	1581.33			

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF AGE MEANS FOR ASIAN GROUPS

	Chinese	Korean	Japanese-Hong Kong-Taiwan
Means	34.7	29.8	27.8

ONE-WAY ANOVA ON AGE

SV	df	SS	MS	F	P
Group	2	298.14	149.07	2.88	0.07
Residual	30	15552.03	51.73		
Total	32	1850.18	57.81		

TABLE 7

COMPARISON OF YEARS OF FORMAL ENGLISH MEANS FOR ASIAN GROUPS

	Chinese	Korean	Japanese-Hong Kong-Taiwan
Means	7.87	9.10	8.38

ONE-WAY ANOVA ON YEARS OF FORMAL ENGLISH

SV	df	SS	MS	F	P
Group	2	9.12	4.56	0.62	0.54
Residual	30	218.50	7.28		
Total	32	227.63			

Hypothesis 4: There is an attitude difference toward the SPEAK Test between ITAs who passed the SPEAK test and those who did not. A one-way anova with two groups who computed to see if there is a significant difference in attitude scores between ITAs who have scored enough to be considered for teaching and those who did not. Individuals who passed the test seem to think more highly of the test than those who did not. Results are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8

COMPARISON OF PASS/FAIL GROUPS ON TOTAL ATTITUDE SCORE

	PASS	FAIL
Means	55.68	51.10

ONE-WAY ANOVA ON TEST OUTCOME

SV	df	SS	MS	F	P
P/F	1	240.87	240.87	4.88	.03*
Residual	46	2268.79	49.32		
Total	47	2509.66			

* significant at .05

Hypothesis 5: Male ITAs and female ITAs in this university think about the SPEAK Test differently. A one-way anova comparison of male and female ITAs showed that there is no significant difference in mean attitude score for male and female ITAs (See Table 9.)

TABLE 9

COMPARISON OF MALE AND FEMALE GROUPS ON TOTAL ATTITUDE SCORE

	MALE	FEMALE
Means	51.36	55.10

ONE-WAY ANOVA ON ATTITUDE SCORES OF MALE AND FEMALE ITAS

SV	df	SS	MS	F	P
M/F	1	163.43	163.43	3.2	0.08
Residual	46	2346.22	51.00		
Total	47	2509.66			

Hypotheses 6 and 7: Age and years of formal English will make a difference in the way ITAs think about the SPEAK test. Results presented in Table 10 show that age is not an important factor influencing how these ITAs think about the test. However, fewer years of English does appear to correlate with higher attitude scores on the SPEAK test.

TABLE 10

CORRELATION AMONG ATTITUDE, AGE & YEARS OF FORMAL ENGLISH

	X3	X4	X5	
X3	1.00	-.05	-.49	X3: total attitude score
X4	-.05	1.00	-.09	X4: age
X5	-.49	-.09	1.00	X5: years of formal English

Discussion

The SPEAK Test is perceived by international teaching assistants to be one of the steps in the procedure for applying to a higher education institution in the U.S. Most of the oral interviews with these ITAs revealed that they perceive the SPEAK Test as a major test. Both male and female students seem to have the same feeling. They see this as one of those tests that needs to be taken in order to be accepted to a graduate degree program. One of the social science ITAs believes that it is not a very accurate evaluation of anybody's ability, and that it does not require any analytical ability.

When we examine the overall reaction of both math-based and social science-based ITAs there is no difference in their perceptions. However, item-by-item statistical analysis revealed some differences in reaction to some questions.

Interaction between field and year in the statistical analysis showed that most people think that the SPEAK Test alone is not enough of a criterion to tell about their oral proficiency. They wished they had had been tested with different kinds of tests besides the SPEAK. Social science-based ITAs have slightly higher means (4.250) than the ITAs that belong to science and engineering (3.916). In addition, math-based and social science-based ITAs think differently about question # 13, which asks them whether they were content with the answers that they had given to the questions on the test. Individuals that belong to math-based sciences appeared to be satisfied with the answers that they had provided during the limited time. This is perhaps because social scientists tend to rely mostly on verbal explanation, while individuals in science and technology tend to explain most of their data in numerical and graphic forms, and in scientific prose instead. Thus they did not express as much dissatisfaction as their counterparts among social science ITAs. However, math-based ITAs think positively about the idea of one of the professors interviewing them instead of taking the SPEAK test, and they favor this idea more than social science ITAs do. One might assume that in engineering fields the questions that professors ask may come across as technical, not needing too much verbal explanation.

Dissatisfaction shown in the content of the answers given after each question is due to two major factors. Almost all the interviewees complained about the limited time supplied at the end of each question for test takers; the time allocated for each item does not exceed one minute. An educated university-level native or nonnative speaker of a language, in order to be content with the test questions, wants to give some interesting, well-thought-out answers to open-ended questions. The second reason may stem from the level of some questions in the test. One of the ITAs

feels that there should be more sensible topics to talk on. She thinks the test needs a lot of improvement:

"I felt the SPEAK test was so simple. God, this is such an insult to me. Sometimes the topics were so foolish, and I did not want to talk about them. This is most humiliating, when you are talking you are not talking sense."

She wished she had taken the test jointly with a group discussing a topic of interest. She believes that the SPEAK test by itself is not a good test, but if it can be combined with other tests, it may provide a sufficient way of testing nonnative speakers for classroom communication.

One of the individuals who passed the test believes that the pictures in the test were so funny that she enjoyed taking the test. Yet she was very dissatisfied with the answers she gave to the pictures; she felt that whatever she did in the test she rushed over. One lacks a real situation and interaction in a real classroom situation. The lack of testing sociolinguistic and strategic competence in performing the tasks is very obvious to the test-takers as well as to test-raters.

During interviews mostly math-based ITAs pointed out the significance of being able to use general English in an American classroom. They know that they can not operate on the technical register all the time. American undergraduates' questions in the classroom vary from subject-specific questions to questions related to classroom-and course-specific routines.

The next interesting difference between these two groups of fields is the reaction elicited for item number 25 which is about the accent of the speaker: Math-based ITAs are not as comfortable as social science ITAs in understanding

the accent of the speaker on the tape. Teaching assistants in math-related fields may not be exposed to narrative type of speech as much as social science-based ITAs.

When we look at the differences in perceptions between ITAs who took the SPEAK test at different times, the results show that ITAs of the 89-90 academic year are more critical about the SPEAK test. They do not believe that they were tested for their oral proficiency as much as the ITAs who took the test a year earlier. ITAs who took the test during the 89-90 academic year seem to have more positive feelings about the idea of taking an oral exam in a group, debating, or talking to another person, rather than talking to a tape. However, ITAs who had taken the test earlier did not consider this idea as highly.

It seems that ITAs in social sciences are in search of a new test instead of the SPEAK test. The interaction between different fields and different years indicates that social-science ITAs would rather have different kinds of tests, such as the TOEFL, an interview with a professor, or exposure to a teaching situation, all affecting the department's decision to hire them as ITAs. At the same time they feel that these alternative ways of testing may be personally and academically more satisfying.

The results of this study show that other than the test outcome (Pass or Fail - 230 points for the University of Minnesota) other variables such as age, gender, different majors or cultural backgrounds do not seem to make significant contributions to the way ITAs think about the SPEAK test. The only interesting finding concerning their background is the level of their English. Individuals with fewer years of formal English education seem to think more positively about the

SPEAK Test. As the proficiency level goes up the individuals seem to become more critical about the SPEAK. Individuals with fewer years of English may have naive ideas about testing.

Interviews with ITA instructors: What do they think about the test?

Interviews with five different instructors at the University of Minnesota pointed out the following thoughts about the SPEAK Test.

Face Validity: The test does not seem to test teaching skills that ITAs need to perform. When someone gets a high score, the TA English program would not be able to tell if this individual would be able to teach or not. The test may be useful in separating out those individuals who have language problems. So it may be simply a test of language. It does not seem to be useful as an actual indicator of classroom performance in a field-specific area. One of the ITAs said that he was expecting to speak, but to speak about his major. There is nothing motivating them to talk. No one is asking questions, they do not know what direction to take. This test does not test their teaching skills, but it is a test of English, language, especially grammar skills. Most teachers believe that ITAs who have good communication skills could pass the test. However, even if the proficiency level of the speaker is high, s/he might hesitate to talk and not provide enough content.

Rating the test:

Grading the test seems to be very tedious. The descriptors are hard to learn quickly. The descriptors are useful in rating the grammatical competence but not sociolinguistic or strategic competence, since there is no interaction involved as testees speak on a tape. We do not know how the language may be used in the

classroom. They do not show how an ITA will interact with undergraduates or whether s/he can successfully convey information. So there is both a cultural and linguistic gap. It is hard to use the descriptors for rating accurately with a language group that the rater is familiar with. If a rater is used to hearing an accent, it becomes more comprehensible for that rater. That accent is easier for the rater to understand, so s/he could grade those students with familiar accents higher than one should or rate others lower than they should be graded. Personal biases or past experiences may affect the grading. It is hard to find sufficient interrater reliability. What is comprehensible to some could be very different from what other persons think of as comprehensible.

Some teachers do not agree with some of the descriptors on the test. It is hard to go along with a set of rating scales that one cannot agree with. Students can get points simply for responding, even if the responses are ungrammatical. As long as they are saying something they get points for content or pronunciation. And even if their answer has nothing to do with the question that is being asked, simply because they do not understand the question, they will get points. And if that is not made clear to ITAs before they take the test, that person may remain silent. The test should make clear that testees should respond no matter what because they are getting points for anything they say.

Comprehensibility is always the difficult category. There is no clear difference between comprehensibility and intelligibility. If the pronunciation is poor, does that necessarily mean comprehensibility is poor? Can comprehensibility as high as the highest score in the section where comprehensibility is evaluated?

The most frequently-mentioned positive aspects of this test indicated by most teachers is that they are pleased to have a standardized test that does not require a

lot of administration time, as opposed to, most other oral interview-style assessments (like the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview) requires. The variety of tasks also gives students a chance to show their area of strength, because some students have strengths in small-detail-level oral English (sentence level, grammar, pronunciation), and others have more strengths in more context-oriented material.

Conclusion:

This study revealed that there is no overall significant difference in ITAs' affective reactions to the SPEAK test in terms of ethnic backgrounds or their fields (Math-social science); nor there is any significant difference between ITAs who took the test in 1988-89 and in 1989-90. ITAs' perceptions of the test do not differ when compared by sex, age, or formal years of English. However, people who passed the test and others who did seem to have differing opinions about the test. Some instructors mentioned the lack of face validity and voiced some concerns about how difficult it was to judge the overall comprehensibility of the ITA. In a testing situation where individuals' speaking proficiency is tested it is inevitable to think of mixed or combined testing situations, using both SPEAK Test types of questions as well as more realistic oral interviews or teaching samples.
When ITAs perform in another language, the other language that they speak portrays their social identity. However, if ITAs do not accept the social identity that is forced through the SPEAK test, they find themselves speaking "nonsense". In terms of policy decisions, a test can be considered as a social criterion that can put people in different "tracks" and "classifications". Thus, using a single educational test can put the individuals at risk. The SPEAK test situation also shows how much

power and control the system gives to a single test , and determine the "truth" about oral proficiency of an individual.

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THE SPEAK TEST

This questionnaire is part of a research project that is being carried out by a graduate student at Curriculum and Instruction in Second Languages and Cultures Education at the University of Minnesota. The results of this project will be used to assess the reliability and accuracy of the oral test and to compare the accuracy with other oral tests that are used for international teaching assistants at different universities in the U.S. For this reasons it is very important that your responses be as frank as possible.

It is important for you to know that the opinions you give are confidential and will not interfere in any way with your relationship to the department that you are in.

Name _____ Country: _____ Date: _____
Phone:

signature: _____ Date of the SPEAK Test: _____

Directions: Please place an "X" on the agreement and disagreement scale which best expresses your opinion. Note that you are asked to explain you response.

e.g. disagree __X__ : ____ : ____ : ____ agree

Questions

Department: _____ Age _____ Sex _____

Please give answers to the following questions.

* How many months have you been in the U.S. or other English-speaking countries?

* How many weeks have you studied English in the U.S.?

* Are you currently taking English courses?

* How many years have you studied English in your native country?

* Have your ever taught a course using English before?

* Which is the highest academic degree that you have received? (Circle)

a) Bachelor's degree
b) Master's degree
c) Ph. D. degree

* How many years of teaching experience do you have?

* Which of the following are you planning to do/or are you doing at this university?

a) grading exams only
b) grading exams and term-papers
c) proctoring exams only
d) holding office hours only
e) doing tutorials only
f) setting up lab equipment only
f) setting up lab equipment and leading lab sessions
g) teaching a class (recitation hours are counted as teaching) and having office hours
h) having the full responsibilities for a class

* How many quarters/years have you been teaching at the University?

* Which of the English tests that you have taken is an accurate evaluation of your English in general? (Circle as many as apply) Please indicate when you took the test. (e.g. 1985)

	year
a) TOEFL	_____
b) Minnesota Battery	_____
c) Test of Spoken English	_____
d) The SPEAK test	_____
e) other (please indicate) _____	_____

1. I believe the SPEAK test is an accurate evaluation of my ability to speak English.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Please explain why:

2. I believe that the SPEAK test is an accurate evaluation of my teaching ability in English in a class.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Please explain why:

3. Which part of the SPEAK test did you enjoy doing the best? *(There are seven parts in the SPEAK test)* **Circle as many as apply.**

I- Section one (In this section there are some questions about yourself)
II- Section two (In this section you are asked to read a paragraph)
III- Section three (In this section you are asked to complete sentences)
IV- Section four (In this section you see a series of pictures that tell a continoues story; you are asked to tell the story that the pictures show)
V- Section five (In this section you look at a picture and are asked some questions about the picture)
VI- Section six (In this section you are asked to give your opinions on topics of international interest and to describe certain objects)
VII- Section seven (In this section you are asked to explain a class schedule or a notice)

Explain why:

4. On the SPEAK test you are given scores for your pronunciation, your use of grammar, fluency, and lastly for your overall comprehensibility (how understandable your English is). Could you give an estimated score that you got on the SPEAK test?

The score for overall comprehensibility is reported on a scale that ranges from

low 0 .....100 ..... 150 .....200..... 250 .....300 completely comprehensible

For pronuncaiton, grammar, and fluency the score range is (0 to 3)
(very low) 0 .....0.5 .....1.5.....2.5.....3.0 (almost like a native speaker)

Pronuncitation	Grammar	Fluency	COMPREHENSIBILITY (your total score on the test)
_____	_____	_____	_____
(score)	(score)	(score)	(score)

I'll let the TA English Program tell the researcher my score on the SPEAK test.

_____

signature

5. I felt nervous before the test

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Please explain why:

6. The test handbook that I read before taking the test was very helpful.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Explain why:

7. I think there should be a week long preparation program for the test before students take the test.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Explain why:

8. Talking to the tape made me very nervous during the SPEAK test.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Explain why:

9. I had had a lot of information about the test before I took the SPEAK test.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Explain why:

10. I wish I had my dictionary with me during the SPEAK test.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

11. The SPEAK test was too short.

disagree ____ : ____ : _____ : ____ agree

explain why:

12. At the end of the test I felt as if I had been tested for my oral proficiency.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

13. At the end of the test I was content with the answers that I had given for each question.

disagree ____ : _____ : _____ : ____ agree

explain why:

14. I'd rather have a conversation with one of the testers than take the SPEAK test.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

15. I believe that the SPEAK test is an ideal way of testing international teaching assistants' teaching and speaking skills.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

16. I believe that American teaching assistants should also take the SPEAK test.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

17. At the end of the test I felt that I had had an adequate opportunity to demonstrate my ability to speak and teach in English.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

18. I think international teaching assistants should take more than one test before they are assigned to be teaching assistants.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

19. I believe that international teaching assistants who have a lot of experience in teaching in their countries should start teaching at the University of Minnesota without being tested.

disagree _____ : _____ : ____ : _____ agree

explain why:

20. If I had taken the same SPEAK test on another day the results would be different.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

21. I believe that oral tests are necessary for international teaching assistants.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

22. I liked the SPEAK test. It is an ideal test for international teaching assistants.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

*23. I thought the SPEAK test tested what I learned in the TA communication skills class this quarter. (This question is not for everyone).

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

24 I wanted to take the SPEAK test again after I took a quarter long classroom communication skills course.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

25. It was difficult to understand the speaker on the SPEAK test because of her/his accent.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

26. I believe if I had been given several different kinds of tests the results of those tests would have told the TA English program more about my English speaking proficiency.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

27. I feel more comfortable when I take an oral exam in a group, or with another student than taking the test by myself, talking to a tape.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

28. I wished I had taken an oral test that would test me on the subject matter in which that I plan to do my graduate study. (e.g. physics, math, food science, engineering, sociology, psychology, literature, etc.)

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree
explain why:

29. Instead of taking the SPEAK test, I wished one of the professors in my department had interviewed me about my general competence in the subject matter that I am going to teach at the University of Minnesota.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

explain why:

30. After taking the SPEAK test and/or taking the TA communication skills class I feel more secure to teach my subject to native speakers.

disagree _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ agree

Explain why:

31. During the SPEAK test I wish I had been asked questions like the following. Please list them here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

32. For ITAs who use languages other than English in the classroom; do you feel you should be expected to take the Speak test?

Other comments:

Thank you for your time and cooperation.